

Credo for Free and Responsible Communication in a Democratic Society

2017 Review Committee: Mary Stuckey (Chair), Mike Sproule, and Kathie Turner

Current Credo (*Adopted by the Speech Association of America in 1963; Reaffirmed by the Legislative Assembly passing the report and recommendations of the Taskforce on the Public Policy Platform in 2011*)

Recognizing the essential place of free and responsible communication in a democratic society, and recognizing the distinction between the freedoms our legal system should respect and the responsibilities our educational system should cultivate, we members of the National Communication Association¹ endorse the following statement of principles:

WE BELIEVE that freedom of speech and assembly must hold a central position among America's constitutional principles, and we express our determined support for the right of peaceful expression by any communicative means available.

WE SUPPORT the proposition that a free society can absorb with equanimity speech which exceeds the boundaries of generally accepted beliefs and mores; that much good and little harm can ensue if we err on the side of freedom, whereas much harm and little good may follow if we err on the side of suppression.

WE CRITICIZE as misguided those who believe that the justice of their cause confers license to interfere physically and coercively with speech of others, and we condemn intimidation, whether by powerful majorities or strident minorities, which attempts to restrict free expression.

WE ACCEPT the responsibility of cultivating by precepts and example, in our classrooms and in our communities, enlightened uses of communication; of developing in our students a respect for precision and accuracy in communication, and for reasoning based upon evidence and a judicious discrimination among values.

WE ENCOURAGE our students to accept the role of well-informed and articulate citizens, to defend the communication rights of those with whom they may disagree, and to expose abuses of the communication process.

WE DEDICATE ourselves fully to these principles, confident in the belief that reason will ultimately prevail in a free marketplace of ideas.

Proposed Revised Credo (May 2017)

The review committee recommends reaffirming the Credo with no changes.

Rationale and Supporting Materials

1. Rationale for why this statement merits Legislative Assembly consideration and how it is reflective of beliefs of those in the communication discipline:

As a group of scholars dedicated to the study of human communication, we must recognize and consider in an official capacity the role that free and responsible communication plays in a democratic society. Free and responsible communication is integral to the creation and maintenance of healthy democratic communities.

2. Relevant background information regarding the Credo for Free and Responsible Communication in a Democratic Society:

The Speech Association of America (now the National Communication Association) adopted this credo in 1963. It was reaffirmed by the Legislative Assembly following the recommendation of the Task Force on Public Policy in 2011. The credo recognizes the integral role of free and responsible communication in democratic society, and affirms the responsibilities of communication scholars in cultivating an atmosphere of free and responsible communication.

3. We recommend reaffirming the Credo with no changes.

4. Supporting materials:

Commitment to free and responsible communication has a long a distinguished history. Examples of this commitment include:

IN A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY, EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON THE PEOPLE—WHO POSSESS A BASIC INTEGRITY BUT FACE CHALLENGES OF MANIPULATION AND DEMAGOGUERY.

“In the next place, as each representative will be chosen by a greater number of citizens in the large than in the small republic, it will be more difficult for unworthy candidates to practice with success the vicious arts by which elections are too often carried; and the suffrages of the people being more free, will be more likely to center on men who possess the most attractive merit and the most diffusive and established characters.” [James Madison, *Federalist Papers*, No. 10, New American Library ed., 1961, 82-83]

“I believe that it may be laid down as a general rule that their [the people’s] confidence in and obedience to a government will commonly be proportioned to the goodness or badness of its administration. It must be admitted that there are exceptions to this rule; but these exceptions depend so entirely on accidental causes that they cannot be considered as having any relation to the intrinsic merits or demerits of a constitution.” [Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist Papers*, No. 27, 174]

“We may define a republic to be . . . a government which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure for a limited period, or during good behavior. It is *essential* to such a government that it be derived from the great body of the society, not from an inconsiderable proportion of a favored class of it . . .” [Madison, *Federalist Papers*, No. 39, 241]

“The federal and State governments are in fact but different agents and trustees of the people, constituted with different powers and designed for different purposes. . . . the ultimate

authority, wherever the derivative may be found, resides in the people alone . . . Truth, no less than decency, requires that the event in every case should be supposed to depend on the sentiments and sanction of their common constituents." [Madison, *Federalist Papers*, No. 46, 294]

"Let us not insult the free and gallant citizens of America with a suspicion that they would be less able to defend the rights of which they would be in actual possession than the debased subjects of arbitrary power would be to rescue theirs from the hands of their oppressors." [Madison, *Federalist Papers*, No. 46, 300]

"As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form. Were the pictures which have been drawn by the political jealousy of some among us faithful likenesses of the human character, the inference would be that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government; and that nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another." [Madison, *Federalist Papers*, No. 55, 346]

"Thus far I have considered the circumstances which point out the necessity of a well-constructed Senate only as they relate to the representatives of the people. To a people as little blinded by prejudice or corrupted by flattery as those whom I address, I shall not scruple to add that such an institution may be sometimes necessary as a defense to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions." [Madison, *Federalist Papers*, No. 63, 384]

"The republican principle demands that the deliberate sense of the community should govern the conduct of those to whom they entrust the management of their affairs; but it does not require an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze of passion, or to every trenchant impulse which the people may receive from the arts of men, who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests. It is a just observation that the people commonly *intend* the PUBLIC GOOD. This often applies to their very errors. But their good sense would despise the adulator later who should pretend that they always *reason right* about the *means* of promoting it. They know from experience that they sometimes err and the wonder is that they so seldom err as they do, beset as they continually are by the wiles of parasites and sycophants, by the snares of the ambitious, avaricious, the desperate, by the artifices of men who possess their confidence more than they deserve it, and of those who seek to possess rather than to deserve it." [Hamilton, *Federalist Papers*, No. 71, 432]

IN THE UNITED STATES, THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY AND EQUALITY MAKE THE PEOPLE VULNERABLE TO IMPOSING THEIR OWN TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY.

"In the United States that omnipotence of the majority which favors the legal despotism of the legislator also smiles on the arbitrary powers of the magistrate. The majority, being in absolute command of both lawmaking and of the execution of laws, equally controlling both rulers and ruled, regards public functionaries as its passive agents and is glad to leave them the trouble of

carrying out its plans. [253-254] . . . Assured of the views and strengthened by the support of the greatest number, they then dare to do things which astonish a European, accustomed though he be to the spectacle of arbitrary power. Thus habits form in freedom that may one day become fatal to that freedom.” [254] [Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, Doubleday, 1969, vol. I, part 2, chap. 7, 253-254]

“It is when one comes to look into the use made of thought in the United States that one most clearly sees how far the power of the majority goes beyond all powers known to us in Europe. [254] . . . I know of no country in which, speaking generally, there is less independence of mind and true freedom of discussion than in America. [254-255] . . . But in a democracy organized on the model of the United States there is only one authority, one source of strength and a success, and nothing outside of it. In America the majority has enclosed thought within a formidable fence. A writer is free inside that area, but woe to the man who goes beyond. Not that he stands in fear of an *auto-da-fe*, but he must face all kinds of unpleasantness and everyday persecution.” [255] [De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. I, part 2, chap. 7, 254-255]

“When equality is complete and old-established, all men, having roughly the same ideas and doing roughly the same things, do not need to come to an understanding or to copy each other in order to behave and even talk in the same way; one sees a lot of petty variations in their manners but no great differences.” [De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. II, part 3, chap. 14, 607]

IN ADDITION, CITIZENS FACE THREATS FROM OUTSIDE PROPAGANDA AND DEMAGOGUERY.

“To be effective, propaganda must constantly short-circuit all thought and decision. It must operate on the individual at the level of the unconscious. He must not know that he is being shaped by outside forces (this is one of the conditions for the success of propaganda), but some central core in him must be reached in order to release the mechanism in the unconscious which will provide the appropriate—and expected—action.” [Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda*, 1965, 27]

“Propaganda can exist only in societies in which second-hand opinion [i.e., mediated] definitely dominates primary opinion [i.e., of direct experience] and the latter is reduced and driven into a minority position; then, when the individual finds himself between the two conflicting types of opinion, he will normally grasp the general, public opinion.” [Ellul, *Propaganda*, 102]

“In fact, no propaganda can work until the moment when a set of facts has become a *problem* in the eyes of those who constitute public opinion.” [Ellul, *Propaganda*, 114]

“The secret of propaganda success or failure is this: Has it or has it not satisfied the unconscious need of the individual whom it addressed?” [138-139] . . . “As most people have the desire and at the same time the incapacity to participate, they are ready to accept the propaganda that will permit them to participate, and which hides their incapacity beneath explanations, judgments, and news, enabling them to satisfy their desires without illuminating their incompetence. [140] . . . And the individual does not want information, but only value judgments and preconceived positions.” [Ellul, *Propaganda*, 140]

“To begin with, what is it that propaganda makes disappear? Everything in the nature of critical and personal judgment.” [Ellul, *Propaganda*, 169]

“The propagandee . . . lives vicariously, through an intermediary. He feels, thinks, and acts through the hero. He is under the guardianship and protection of his living god; he accepts being a child; he ceases to defend his own interests, for he knows his hero loves him and everything his hero decides is for the propagandee’s own good” [Ellul, *Propaganda*, 173]

“Thus, some of democracy’s fundamental aspects [i.e., respect for truth, the individual, multi-perspectives, ethical behavior, and common action, [239-240] paralyze the conduct of propaganda. There is, therefore, no ‘democratic’ propaganda.” [241] [Ellul, *Propaganda*, 241]

PROPAGANDA DRAWS ON ELEMENTS OF DOUBLESPEAK.

“Doublespeak is language that pretends to communicate but really doesn’t. It is language that makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant appear attractive or at least tolerable. Doublespeak is language that avoids or shifts responsibility, language that is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is language that conceals or prevents thought; rather than extending thought, doublespeak limits it.” [1] . . . “There are at least four kinds of doublespeak, the first is the euphemism [2] . . . A second kind of doublespeak is jargon [3] . . . A third kind of doublespeak is gobbledygook or bureaucratese [5] . . . The fourth kind of doublespeak is inflated language [6] [William Lutz, *Doublespeak*, 1989, 1-6]

THE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION LIES AT THE ROOT OF PUBLIC PROBLEMS.

“The alternatives before us are not factually limited science on one hand and uncontrolled speculation on the other. The choice is between blind, unreasoned attack and defense on the one hand, and discriminating criticism employing intelligent method and a conscious criterion on the other.” [John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 1927, 7]

“Those indirectly and seriously affected for good or for evil form of group distinctive enough to require recognition and a name. The name selected is The Public.” [Dewey, *Public*, 35]

“Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible.” [Dewey, *Public*, 142]

“There can be no public without full publicity in respect to all consequences which concern it. Whenever obstructs and restricts publicity, limits and distorts public opinion and checks and distorts thinking on social affairs. Without freedom of expression, not even methods of social inquiry can be developed. For tools can be evolved and perfected only in operation; in application to observing, reporting and organizing actual subject-matter; and this application cannot occur save through free and systematic communication.” [Dewey, *Public*, 167]

“When we say that thinking and beliefs should be experimental, not absolutistic, we have then in mind a certain logic of method, not, primarily, the carrying on of experimentation like that of laboratories.” [Dewey, *Public*, 202]

“The essential need, in other words, is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public.” [Dewey, *Public*, 208]

“Until secrecy, prejudice, bias, misrepresentation, and propaganda as well as sheer ignorance are replaced by inquiry and publicity, we have no way of telling how apt for judgment of social policies the existing intelligence of the masses may be. . . . No matter what are the differences in native intelligence . . . the actuality of mind is dependent upon the education which social conditions effect.” [Dewey, *Public*, 209]

FREEDOM REQUIRES CITIZENS TO CONTINUALLY EDUCATE THEMSELVES.

“Freedom is an achievement, not a gift. We do not acquire freedom—we grow into freedom.” [70] . . . “The first step toward liberation is taken when an individual begins to understand what inhibits, frustrates, subjugates him.” [71] “Propaganda organizations will of course make use of adult education as a means to achieve their preconceived environmental ends—which, unhappily, will lead to further illusions concerning education.” [75]. [Eduard C. Lindeman, *The Meaning of Adult Education*, 1926, 71, 75]

ONGOING POINT-COUNTERPOINT IS A REQUISITE FOR EDUCATING PUBLICS.

“While it is not the business of education to prove every statement made, any more than to teach every possible item of information, it is its business to cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded, and to ingrain into the individual’s working habits methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problems that present themselves. No matter how much an individual knows as a matter of hearsay and information, if he has not attitudes and habits of this sort, he is not intellectually educated.” [John Dewey, *How We Think*, 1910, 28]

“Upon examination, each instance [of reflective thought] reveals, more or less clearly, five logically distinct steps: (i) a felt difficulty; (ii) its location and definition; (iii) suggestion of possible solution; (iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion; (v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief.” [Dewey, *How We Think*, 72]

“The underlying notion [of Herbart’s steps of instruction] is that no matter how subjects vary in scope and detail there is one and only one best way of mastering them, since there is a single ‘general method’ uniformly followed by the mind in effective attack upon any subject. . . . [I]n each case the first step is preparation, the second presentation, followed in turn by comparison and generalization, ending with the application of the generalizations to specific and new instances.” [Dewey, *How We Think*, 202] “If we compare this account of the methods of

instruction with our own analysis of a complete operation of thinking, we are struck by obvious resemblances.” [Dewey, *How We Think*, 203]

“[W]e may raise the question whether the recitation [method of Herbart] should, in any case follow a uniform prescribed series of steps—even if it be admitted that this series expresses the normal logical order. In reply, it must be said that just because the order is logical, it represents the survey of subject-matter made by one who already understands it, not the path of progress followed by a mind that is learning. The former may describe a uniform straight-way course, the latter must be a series of tacks, of zig-zag movements back and forth. In short, the formal steps indicate the points that should be covered by the teacher in preparing to conduct a recitation, but should not prescribe the actual course of teaching.” [Dewey, *How We Think*, 204]

THOUGHTFUL READING AND COMMUNICATION ARE ESSENTIAL IN A MEDIATED WORLD.

“In this age of instantaneous mass communications, words do not seem to be as precious as they once were. We seem to be overwhelmed by information and a superfluity of words without meaning. Songs have become commodities, written for quick sale and turnover, not as vehicles for communal expression, inspiration and amusement. Politicians seldom speak without reference to focus groups or pollsters to learn what people want to hear; fearful of making a mistake, they use talking points or a text prepared by consultants and writers. Pollsters tell us what we think before we have had a chance to make up our minds; marketing experts divine what we want before we have lost interest in what we already have. This is an age of disposable ideas, of politics-as-entertainment, of a popular culture that celebrates violence and sensationalism and that is made for the instant, not for the ages.” [Diane Ravitch, “Introduction,” *The American Reader*, revised second ed., 2000, xix-xx]

“But reading is not about to disappear. Despite the ease and immediacy of the electronic media, written language will continue to be indispensable for intelligent communication. Those who cannot use it will find themselves manipulated and directed by those who can. Those who only listen and watch will be at the mercy of those who read, those who write scripts, program computers, interpret news, and extract meaning from the past. No matter how powerful and omnipresent the technology of the future, we will still rely on the power of words and ideas. Those who command them will be enabled to affect the world. Those who cannot will find themselves excluded not only from jobs and opportunities, but from all those experiences that allow us to reflect on the significance of our lives.” [Ravitch, “Introduction,” *American Reader*, xxii-xxiii]